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ABSTRACT

The dynamics of hosting foreign exchange students were studied by means of a longitudinal documentation of the experiences and feelings of 15 U.S. families before, during, and after the 10 months when they hosted an American Field Service (AFS) exchange student. Data were gathered by means of semistructured, open-ended, audio-taped interviews conducted by a single interviewer in each family's home. Most families were interviewed seven times. Families interviewed represented the range of social, economic, and geographic backgrounds of AFS host families. Three general types of host families were identified: those who had a uniformly positive hosting experience, those who experienced periods of conflict which were ultimately resolved successfully, and those whose overall experience was unsatisfactory. Findings indicated that a successful host experience was directly related to positive personality factors rather than cultural factors, positive student-host sibling relationships rather than student-host parent relationships, exchange student willingness to become involved in host family activities, and infrequency of telephone contact with the exchange student's natural parents. Detailed summaries of three case studies and graphs illustrating interview findings are provided. (LP)

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RESEARCH REPORTS

SEPTEMBER 1984

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DYNAMICS OF INTERNATIONAL HOST FAMILIES

SO 015 918

RESEARCH REPORT

27

The Research Department. AFS International/Intercultural Programs, Inc.

The mission of the AFS Research Department is to . . .

- carry out research and evaluation projects that potentially will lead to increased understanding of the nature and impact of AFS exchanges, to improved implementation of AFS programs and operations, and/or to enhanced intercultural learning by AFS participants;

- collect and develop innovative cross-cultural orientation materials and procedures that potentially will improve the quality of the learning experience associated with participation in an AFS program;

- maintain contact with members of the scholarly, educational, and professional communities around the world who are interested in international and intercultural exchange of persons; and

- serve as a consultant to members of the worldwide AFS community with respect to research and evaluation, orientation and training, and other activities as may be appropriate.

DYNAMICS OF INTERNATIONAL HOST FAMILIES

Paper presented at the First National Conference of the Transcultural Family, Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio, on September 11th, 1984.

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Director of Research
AFS International/Intercultural Programs
New York, New York

AFS International/Intercultural Programs is one of the oldest and largest of the world's numerous exchange organizations; currently it is operating in more than 60 nations, developed and developing. One of the ways in which AFS distinguishes itself from other exchange organizations is that it supports a full-time research staff. The challenge to myself and my assistant, Bettina Hansel, is to ever more thoroughly understand the nature and impact of the intercultural experiences of AFS program participants, and to use the knowledge thus gained to make recommendations for improving AFS programs and operations. Over the past several years, our attention has been directed primarily at understanding the AFS experience as it pertains to adolescent students and their host families. Our "Study of the Dynamics of Hosting," which began early in 1980, has been our major project directed at understanding hosts.

To the best of our knowledge, only one major study of international host families has preceded our own. This earlier study was carried out more than a dozen years ago in Bogota, Colombia, where Bogotano families were hosting U.S. Peace Corps volunteers and university students for up to six months. The final report of that project is one of the most fascinating items of literature in the entire field of cross-cultural

studies. It is Raymond Gordon's *Living in Latin America*, still available from National Textbook Company of Lincolnwood, Illinois. Gordon's findings specify the seemingly trivial cross-cultural misunderstandings that, in a surprisingly high percentage of cases, seriously undermined relationships between the young U.S. adults and their Bogotano hosts.

AFS's Study of the Dynamics of Hosting was *not* conceived as a replication of Gordon's study. In fact, part of our research approach was to clear our heads, insofar as possible, of all previously learned information and preconceived assumptions about the nature of the student-host relationship. As our study neared its end, we recognized that Gordon's work *had* influenced us in an important way, but this influence enabled us to view one of our findings as especially significant. More on this later.

At a place such as AFS, there exists a great deal of lore regarding host families, but this lore very largely concerns hosts involved in placements requiring intervention due to serious problems of various kinds. As with many other exchange organizations, AFS's family-change rate for all programs averages about 25%; even in these cases, the focus of our overworked staff is on the *specific* issues or misunderstandings that have created the feeling that a student-host separation is necessary. Consequently, systematic knowledge regarding the general nature of the host family experience has been lacking, not only in the field at large but even at an organization such as AFS that deals extensively with hosts.

The Study of the Dynamics of Hosting is a naturalistic, longitudinal documentation of the experiences and feelings of 15 U.S. host families

before, during, and after the ten months when they hosted an adolescent exchange student under AFS's auspices. The sole method of gathering data consisted of semi-structured, open-ended, audio-taped interviews held by a single and consistent investigator with family members in their home. Most families were interviewed seven times; each interview lasted from one to three hours. In many instances, the exchange student was interviewed as well. The focus of this project, however, has been on the experiences of the host families, not on those of the exchange students.

The 15 families were carefully selected in order to be representative of the types of people who volunteer to host for AFS. Among them are families headed by a laborer, a dairy farmer, a truck driver, a widowed bank teller, a college librarian, a minister, an engineer, an orthodontist, and a vice president of one of the world's best known corporations. They live in medium-sized cities, affluent suburbs, small towns, and isolated rural areas. Their natural children who are living in the home range from college students to youngsters of 10, 9, and even 5 years of age; one of the families has no natural children. Due to AFS's financial constraints, most of the families are located within several hundred miles of New York City in Pennsylvania, New Jersey, New York, and Connecticut; however, three of them reside in the vicinity of St. Louis, Missouri; an AFS volunteer who lives there, Nancy Painter, interviewed them for us. The families were selected in such a way that their exchange students would be representative of the students AFS brings into the U.S.: six are from Europe, three are from South America, two are from Africa, two are from Asia, one is from the Middle East, and one is from Oceania.

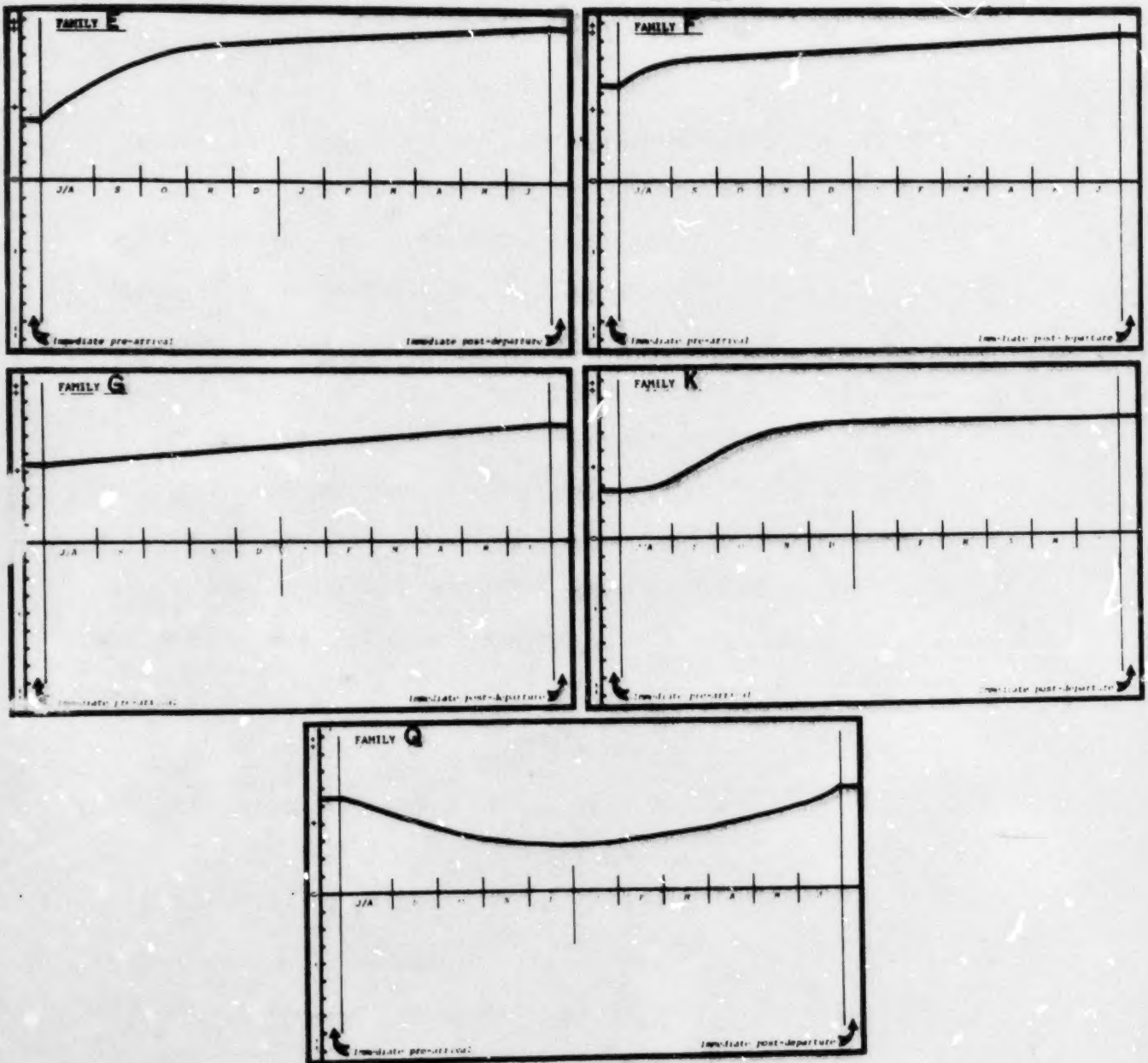
The primary method that we have used to conceptualize and illustrate the experience of each family is a kind of graph on which we have "plotted" each family's relational and emotional fluctuations over the course of the year. On this graph, the horizontal midline indicates emotional neutrality. Increasing distance above that line indicates greater and greater contentment, satisfaction, and positive affect. Increasing distance below the midline illustrates greater and greater conflict, dissatisfaction, and negative affect. The distance above or below the line where any given family's reactions are plotted is subjectively meaningful to members of the research team but is impossible to specify objectively or in terms of any recognized unit of measurement. However, we have taken great pains to insure that all 15 graphs are consistent and meaningful *in relation to each other.* In other words, if Family A's graph is higher for the month of December than Family B's, this indicates our conviction that A's experience was proceding more positively than B's at that time. Moreover, the linear distance between the two graphs at that point is directly proportional (as subjectively evident to us) to the degree of difference between the relational and emotional states of the two families at that time. It is worth noting, also, that each graph was drawn by the interviewer in consultation with the family involved; the drawing was first agreed upon at the interview immediately following the exchange student's departure, and was reviewed at the interview one year after the student's departure.

At the end of our four years of interviewing, when we assembled the 15 graphs, we were struck by the general similarities that appeared among them. Almost effortlessly, we were able to divide the graphs into three

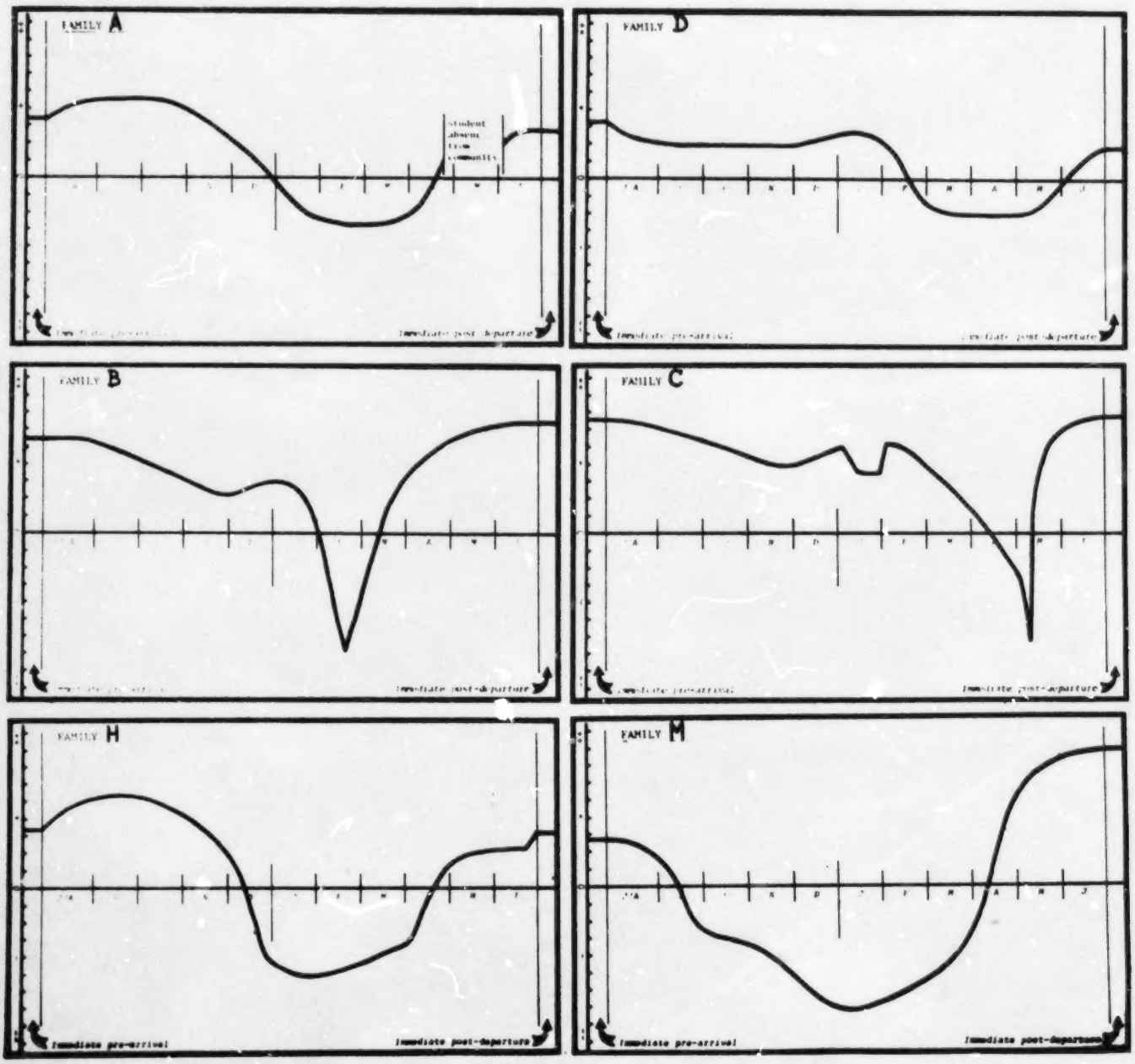
general types, which are illustrated on the following three pages. Type A includes five graphs; the hosting experiences of these five families were uniformly positive throughout the year. Type B includes six graphs; the hosting experiences of these six families involved periods of significant conflict and dissatisfaction, all of which were resolved more or less successfully before the end of the year. Especially interesting are the apparent similarities *within* Type B. Families A and D both experienced a moderate degree of dissatisfaction lasting approximately three months. Families B and C both experienced a sharp but relatively brief period of dissatisfaction. And families H and M both experienced periods of dissatisfaction that were long and comparatively severe. (Because of the small number of cases involved, we can hardly claim significance for these similar groups within Type B, but we are fascinated by them nonetheless.) Type C comprises four graphs; the hosting experiences of these four families ultimately were not satisfactory. Subgroup C-1 includes two families who kept the exchange student throughout the year; Subgroup C-2 comprises two families from whom the exchange student was separated during the year due to maladjustment. We suspect that in our Types A, B, C-1, and C-2 we may have identified the general paradigms of the host family experience, at least as it tends to occur in the United States.

The rate at which students were separated from hosts among our subjects is 13%, about half of the typical family-change rate of 25%. We think that this fact is worthy of note. Our research approach very explicitly called upon us to be nonjudgemental and nonprescriptive in dealing with our interviewees; we listened to each other's tapes and critiqued one another with

TYPE A: UNIFORMLY POSITIVE HOSTING EXPERIENCES

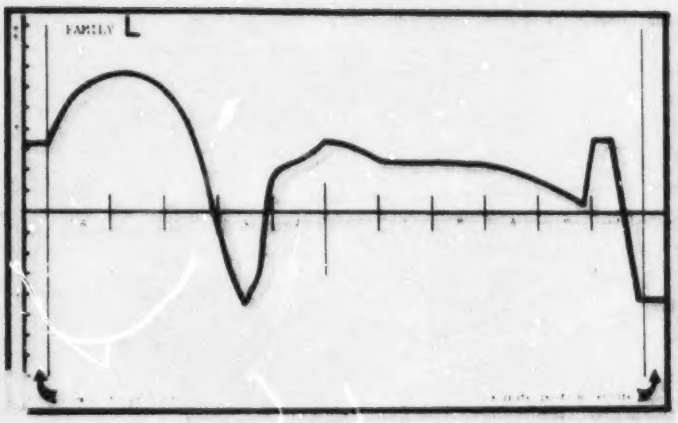


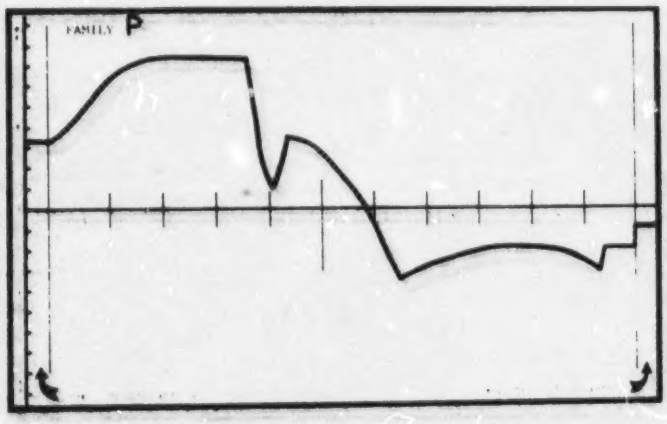
TYPE B: EXPERIENCES ENDING POSITIVELY AFTER MID-YEAR DIFFICULTIES



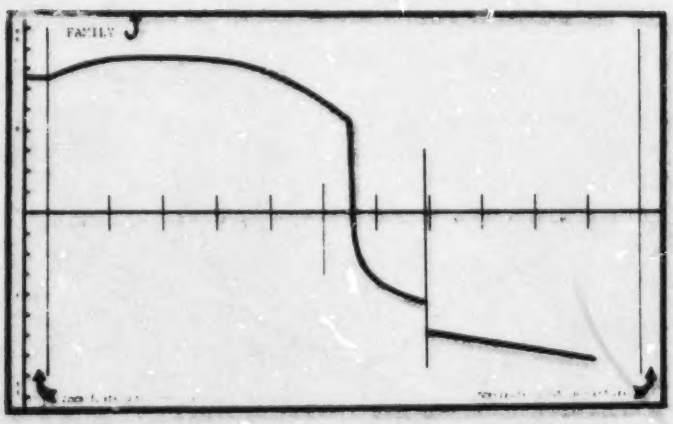
TYPE C: HOSTING EXPERIENCES ENDING NEGATIVELY

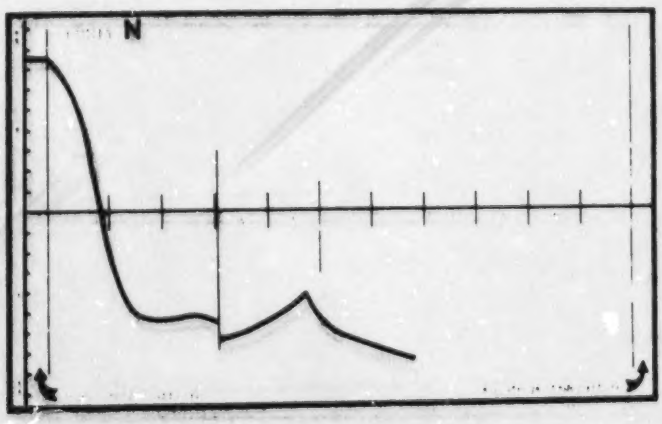
SUBGROUP C-1: STUDENT REMAINED TO END OF YEAR





SUBGROUP C-2: STUDENT REMOVED BEFORE END OF YEAR





respect to any propensity whatsoever to act as a counselor. Our aim was generally to ask a leading question and then to listen, listen, listen so long as the family member was discussing anything relating to the hosting experience or his reactions to it. Nevertheless, we cannot help but wonder whether our willingness to listen patiently, knowledgeably, and sympathetically as host family members unburdened themselves may have been one key factor in cutting the family-change rate in half among our sample. We are definitely aware that my repeated presence in the homes of Families H and I provided a useful "safety valve" for the host siblings, who in both cases were very much agitated by certain personality features of the student.

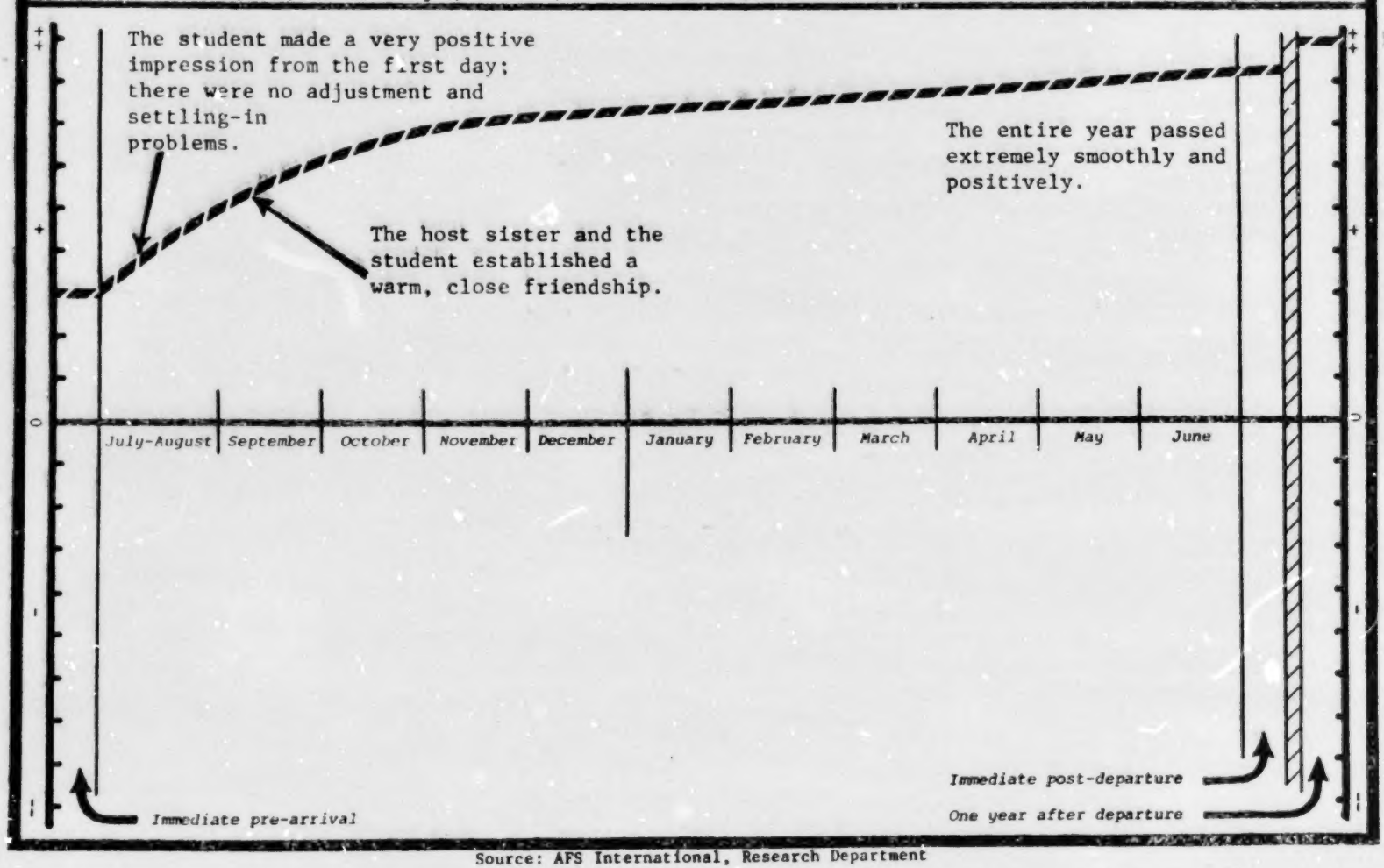
Now I will turn immediately to descriptions of a few of our most interesting cases. Enormous oversimplification is necessary due to the time and space limitations under which I have agreed to report, but the following sketches should be instructive nonetheless.

Our five cases of uniformly positive hosting experiences (Type A) tend to be somewhat less interesting -- or at any rate less dramatic -- than those in which difficulties were encountered. But I would like to begin with the briefest possible summary of the case that we've come to see as the most nearly ideal, that of Family E. Basic facts about this family are found on the graph on the following page. Of all 15 families that we studied, this one was the most intellectual; the father holds a Ph.D., the mother a masters degree, and both are exceptionally thoughtful and well informed. Their daughter, on the other hand, either was not intellectually inclined or (more likely) was resisting her natural inclinations. More

FAMILY E

FATHER: 50, professor and psychologist
MOTHER: 48, high school social studies teacher
CHILDREN AT HOME: female 14 (only child)
LOCATION: Pennsylvania, suburb of Philadelphia
SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS: upper middle class
STUDENT: female, 16, from Italy (Trieste)

SUMMARY: In spite of the reluctance of the daughter about the idea of hosting, she and the student swiftly developed a firm friendship that became the basis of a very positive experience for this family. The host and natural families, all intellectuals, exchanged massive correspondence during (and after) the hosting year.



Source: AFS International, Research Department

(10)

significant was this girl's personality, thus described by her mother: "She is a shy child outside the home and an explosive, hyperactive one inside the home." By "explosive," the mother was referring to her daughter's frequent outbursts of anger and frustration toward her parents. The parents seemed able to take all this in stride, perhaps in part because both of them worked professionally with teenagers, including disturbed ones; they clearly believed it is better to get things off your chest than to keep them bottled up. As an only child, the daughter held exclusive control over her own bedroom, bathroom, telephone, and television. On her family's AFS application, she wrote: "I am free to do and say what I want at home." The daughter had a virtually inseparable friend who lived two miles away and was considered part of the family. Family E hosted because the mother enthusiastically promoted the idea. The father allowed himself to be convinced, but the daughter was dubious about the idea and accepted her parents' decision reluctantly. Local AFS volunteers concluded that the daughter's behavior and personality was the key to identifying an exchange student to be placed with Family E, but an AFS district representative who knew the family wrote AFS a letter emphasizing "the very intense and aggressive intellectual nature" of the parents and urging that this characteristic be of paramount importance in selecting a student. Apparently it was.

The student placed with Family E was the child of two accomplished university professors. She was described as respectful and mature, as getting along well with adults, and as "willing to communicate." But she was also described as shy, timid, and reflective, qualities that

inhibited her from demonstrating the brilliance she was known to possess. This girl was two full years older than her prospective host sister, and was considerably more mature as well. On the other hand, the host sister was physically larger and socially much more commanding in presence than the quiet European. In sum, the student seemed an excellent choice from the point of view of the host parents, but not necessarily from the point of view of their daughter.

To make a long and delightful story very, very short, the two girls began developing a firm friendship almost from the first hour they were together, and this friendship never seriously wavered throughout the entire year. Family E's mercurial daughter readily accepted the shy European as a model for behavior as well as an older sister, and said that she was grateful for the reduction in her parents' attention to herself. The European girl proved to be a model exchange student in every way. The host parents were delighted with her and with the improvements they began to see in their own daughter in terms of her interest in studying and her general behavior. The relationship between the daughter and her long-time neighborhood friend remained undamaged; the girls sometimes did things together as a threesome. Equally important, the host parents began communicating with the European girl's natural parents by letter and occasionally by telephone, and a very positive relationship began to bloom. The host father became the pen-pal of the European's 11-year-old brother. At the end of the year, the host father summed up the family's experience by saying: "We didn't have a single bad day during the entire year!"

Our analysis of this family's experience focuses on the following

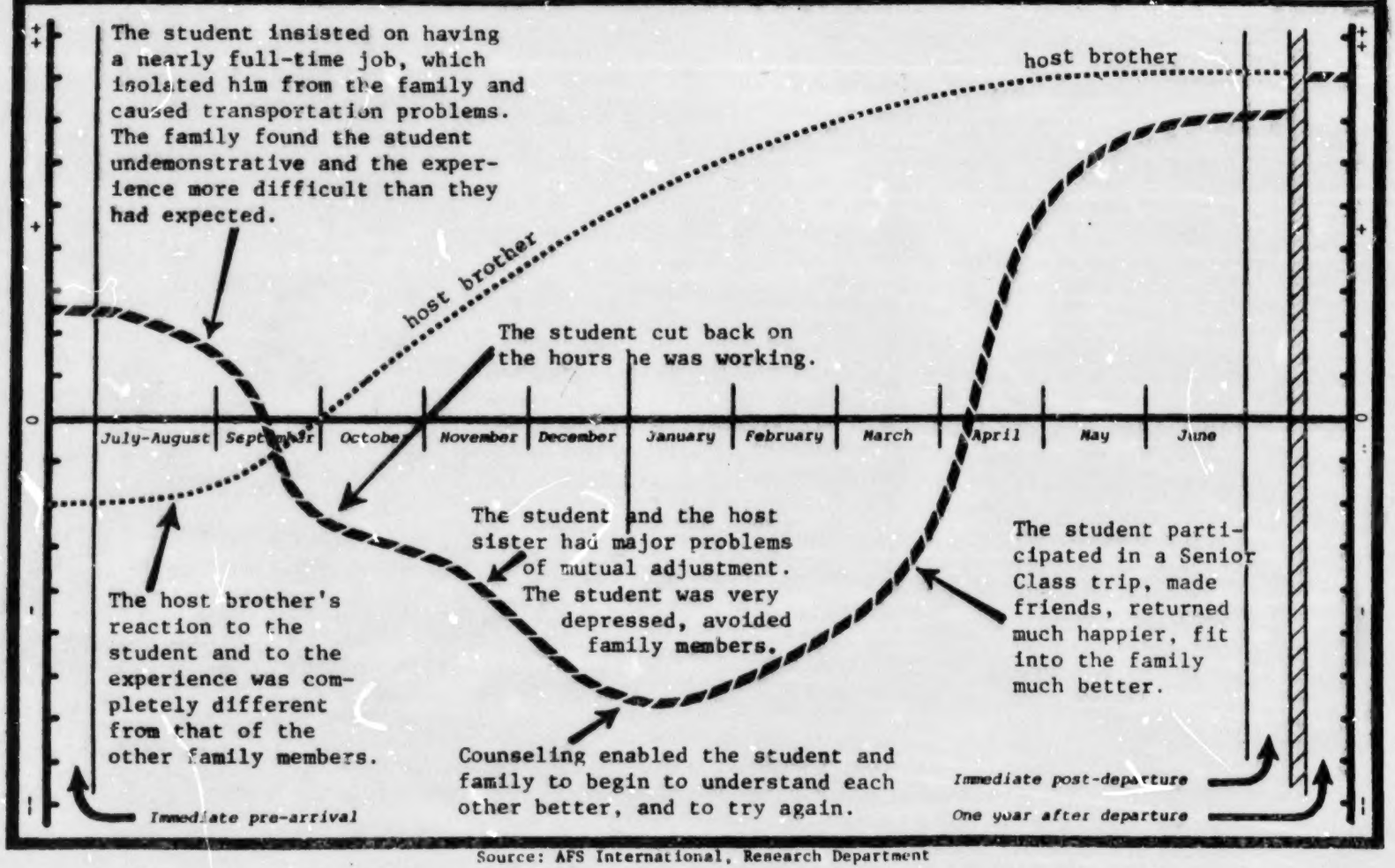
factors: (1) the European girl's delightful personality and sensitivity to others; (2) the host parents' broad experience with adolescents and commitment to a child-centered family organization; (3) the similarity in intellectual level of the host and natural families; (4) the willingness of the European girl's natural parents to respond warmly to their daughter's hosts, without feeling threatened by the obvious closeness of the student-host relationship; and, perhaps most importantly, (5) the daughter's open-hearted acceptance of the European as a model and as an older sister, a reaction that no one could have predicted with confidence.

Of the six cases of Type B hosting experiences, Family M's is the most poignant. An outstanding trait of the parents of Family M is their flexibility and spontaneity; there is no routine that they cannot alter to enable a family member to take advantage of some enjoyable activity. Even guests can be accommodated on short notice. The parents are open-minded and not authoritarian in dealing with their children. As the father put it, they have a feeling "that we have to meet our children's expectations." There is much communication among family members; dinner-table conversations, for instance, are valued by all. The two children are good students and participate in activities in school and out. But the two are frequently in conflict. Family M hosted because they were approached by local AFS volunteers after the mother had previously voiced interest in exchange students who had made presentations at PTA meetings. The father and daughter were readily persuaded, but the son -- who would be the principal host sibling -- was not enthusiastic about hosting. As the parents had lived in Germany for two years and found Western European

FAMILY M

FATHER: 35, engineer, large corporation
MOTHER: 35, homemaker / part-time gov't worker
CHILDREN AT HOME: male 15; female 13
LOCATION: small city, upstate New York
SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS: middle / upper middle class
STUDENT: male, 18, from Kenya

SUMMARY: Cross-cultural differences and the student's insistence on having a paying job led to major difficulties in student-family adjustment. Skilled counseling enabled all parties to try to bring about an improvement, and the family ended the year feeling highly positive about their hosting experience.


The student insisted on having a nearly full-time job, which isolated him from the family and caused transportation problems. The family found the student undemonstrative and the experience more difficult than they had expected.
host brother
host brother
The student cut back on the hours he was working.
July-August
September
October
November
December
January
February
March
April
May
June
The host brother's reaction to the student and to the experience was completely different from that of the other family members.
The student and the host sister had major problems of mutual adjustment. The student was very depressed, avoided family members.
The student participated in a Senior Class trip, made friends, returned much happier, fit into the family much better.
Counseling enabled the student and family to begin to understand each other better, and to try again.
Immediate pre-arrival
Immediate post-departure
One year after departure

Source: AFS International, Research Department

culture similar to that of the U.S., they asked for a student from farther afield. "We would have more to gain from it," explained the father.

The student placed with Family M was from a small Kikuyu village in central Kenya; he had never even been to Nairobi before travelling there for his AFS orientation. As was the custom in his tribe, he lived and ate in a house near to but separate from that of his parents and younger siblings. He was the top student in his secondary school class and received admiring reports from those who wrote on his behalf: "humble," "well disciplined," and "very pleasant to live with" figure in his headmaster's description. Among his extracurricular activities were visiting the sick and raising money for the disabled. In sum, the prospects for this placement looked about as good as could be expected, given the large cultural gap involved. The family recognized the existence of this gap as well as the difficulties in adjustment potentially facing the Kenyan. The daughter later admitted to thinking the student might be "primitive."

Very soon after arriving, the student announced that it was his intention to earn as much money as possible while in the U.S. The host parents perceived this goal to conflict sharply with their expectations for the year, and felt angry with AFS for allowing one of its students to arrive in the U.S. with the goal of working to earn money. (AFS rules state that students may work a maximum of 10 hours per week.) The student found a nearly full-time job at an apple-packing plant and began working. Simultaneously, he experienced academic difficulties at school, but, with the aid of local AFS volunteers, arranged an easier course

schedule. At home, the host brother still disliked the idea of hosting; he often left the house in order to avoid the student. The host sister and the student got into heated arguments that apparently had their origin in the sister's readiness to openly criticize many minor features of the student's behavior. The host parents perceived the Kenyan as lacking in warmth and responsiveness. Intellectually, they were able to rationalize this problem as stemming from the student's living arrangements (vis-a-vis his natural parents) in Kenya, but they were disappointed nonetheless that the student seemed more a stranger than a family member. Said the mother, "We're finding this much harder than we thought it would be."

By the time winter set in, the situation in Family M's household had become dismal due to the ever increasing tension between the student and the host sister. She criticized him so freely that he began doing less and less with the family, even to the point of leaving a room when other family members entered. Seeing the student so distant and discontented, the host parents felt that they were failing in their roles. Moreover, they felt burdened by the student's transportation needs to and from his place of employment. However, a bright side to this story was beginning to emerge -- the Kenyan and the host brother were becoming friendly. Their relationship began to warm when the student told the brother about his girlfriends in Kenya, and it really began to blossom when the two of them worked together cutting wood for the family's wood-burning stove. The brother found in time that the Kenyan never violated his confidences (quite unlike his American friends!), and the two began sharing their most intimate secrets with one another.

But the overall situation had become so depressing that, just before Christmas, the host parents seriously considered the possibility of having the student moved permanently to another family. But at this critical moment, an AFS Area Representative (a volunteer) entered the picture. She worked intensively with both family and student, then gave the family a respite by arranging for the student to spend a few days with a fellow Kenyan in another state. After the student returned, she held individual counseling sessions with him and with each family member. Everyone was encouraged to try again on the basis of better mutual understanding.

Although the situation remained far from satisfactory, it definitely showed signs of improvement during the first three months of the new year. The family began to see more good qualities in the student. The student stopped exiting rooms when others entered. The host sister and the student, on the other hand, avoided each other so as to stay out of conflict. The relationship between the student and the host brother continued to solidify throughout this period.

Near the end of March, the Kenyan went on a senior class trip to Washington, DC, along with 40 or 50 peers. Because he shared a room with three other boys and generally became well acquainted with several other classmates, he established himself as part of a large circle of friends. Upon returning home, he was obviously happier, which proved a great relief to the host parents. The journey also provided a break in the tension-filled relationship between the AFSer and the host sister; when he returned, their relationship improved rapidly and soon they actually were joking around with each other! The mother summed up her feelings at this time

in this way: "Maybe it's not love, but I think it's liking."

In the final two months of this homestay, everything seemed to fall into place. The Kenyan remained happy because of the good times he was having with his schoolmates. The host sister lost all animosity toward him. The student began riding a bicycle to work, relieving the parents of the burden of transportation. The host brother continued to view the student as his closest and most trusted friend. The host parents were pleased because the AFSer finally had gained what they had hoped he would gain: he had become a member of an American family. They derived enormous satisfaction from the positive impact they had had *as host parents* on this student. As the experience came to an end, their overwhelmingly positive feelings were sufficient to move them to tears.

Our analysis of this family's experience focuses on the following factors: (1) the Kenyan's initial goals for his AFS year, which were at variance with the expectations of AFS and his hosts; (2) the sharp differences in personal styles of the Kenyan and the host sister; (3) the extreme cultural differences separating the student and the host family; (4) the open-mindedness, flexibility, and non-authoritarian approach to adolescents of the host parents; (5) the salutary effect of short separations on a situation rife with conflict; and, perhaps most importantly, (6) the skillful intervention of the volunteer AFS counselor, which seems to have been the single most decisive factor in enabling this hosting experience to arrive at a happy ending.

Among the four Type C cases, that of Family J is especially thought-provoking. All members of this family seem committed to family life. The mother and father take the responsibilities of parenthood seriously and supervise their children closely. The children seem to perceive the house rules as arising out of genuine warmth and concern, and as applied consistently and fairly; one described her parents as "very helpful." Three married children either visit frequently or keep in touch by telephone. The father's parents live in a separate apartment on the premises and the mother's parents are visited annually and telephoned regularly. Large family gatherings occur almost weekly, and friends (including teenagers) of family members are included. The two daughters living at home get along well despite the older one's being outgoing and mercurial and the younger one's being reticent if not shy. Family J hosted because they enjoy having teenagers around the house and because they previously had come to know two exchange students befriended by the 19-year-old daughter during her senior year in high school. The mother viewed hosting as a special opportunity for the youngest child, the 17-year-old.

The student placed with Family J was barely 16 years old when she arrived. Her father had died six years previously, and she lived a comfortable, upper middle class, urban life with her mother in Amman, Jordan. Her brothers were engineers, two of whom had studied or were studying in English-speaking countries. The girl's oldest brother felt that she had been spoiled by her mother; the mother described their relationship as sisterly and "deep." (Neither mother nor daughter had a sister.)

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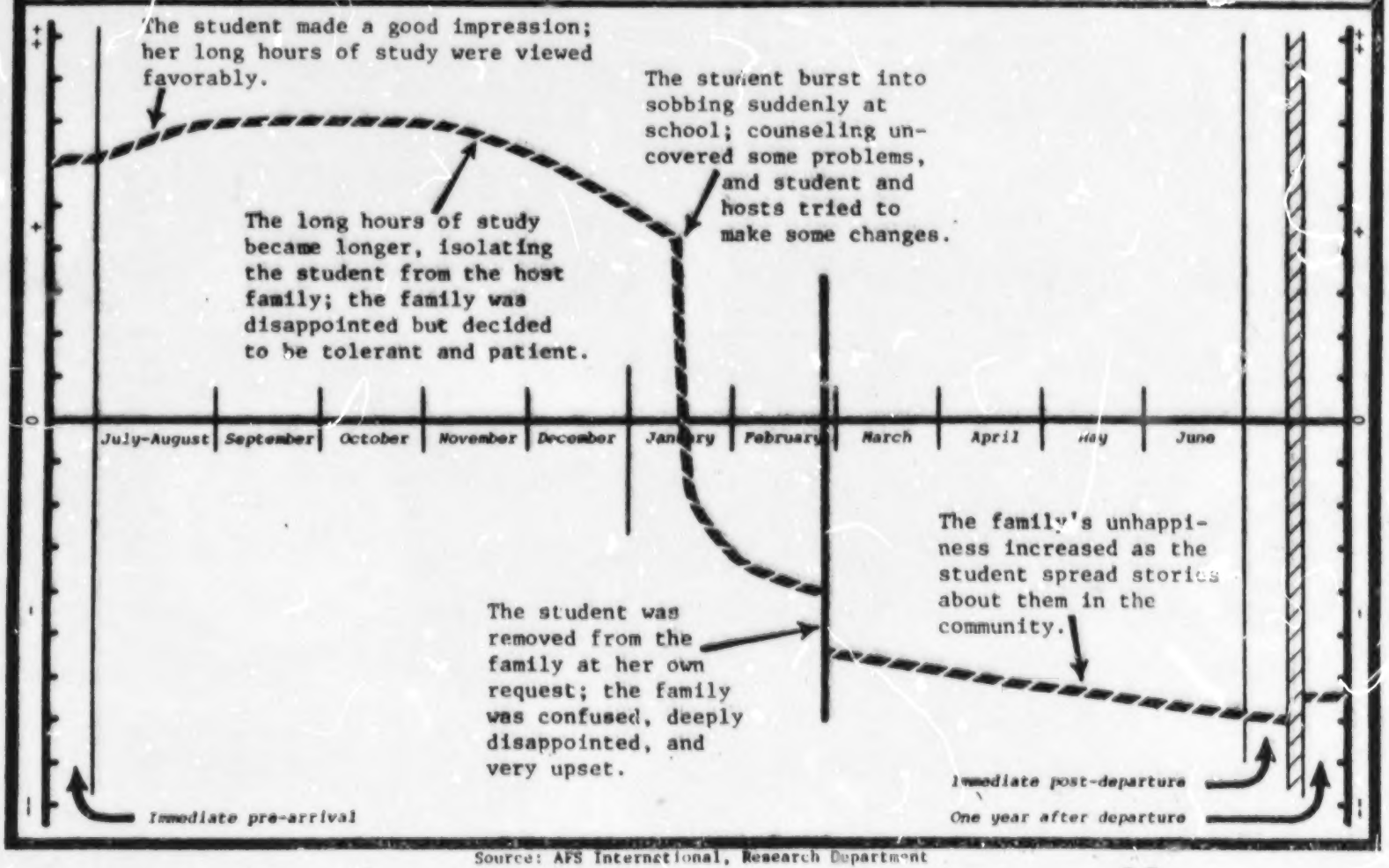
FAMILY J

FATHER: 53, truck driver
MOTHER: 51, rural mail carrier
CHILDREN AT HOME: females 19, 17
LOCATION: near small town in upstate New York
SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS: lower middle class
STUDENT: female, 16, from Jordan (Amman)

SUMMARY: With its initial high expectations apparently confirmed, this family failed to notice signs that the student was becoming increasingly unhappy. After the student broke down, counseling and an effort by student and hosts to improve the situation was unable to bridge the huge gap of misunderstanding that existed.


The student made a good impression; her long hours of study were viewed favorably.
The long hours of study became longer, isolating the student from the host family; the family was disappointed but decided to be tolerant and patient.
The student burst into sobbing suddenly at school; counseling uncovered some problems, and student and hosts tried to make some changes.
The student was removed from the family at her own request; the family was confused, deeply disappointed, and very upset.
The family's unhappiness increased as the student spread stories about them in the community.
July-August
September
October
November
December
January
February
March
April
May
June
Immediate pre-arrival
Immediate post-departure
One year after departure

Source: AFS International, Research Department

The girl herself wrote that "mother is the world" and noted that the two of them shared a bedroom. Otherwise, her application portrayed her as socially active and people-oriented. Supposing that her daughter would be homesick in the U.S., the mother asked AFS to place her in a very friendly family with sisters -- *not* brothers -- to whom she could relate. Family J's reaction upon receiving the Jordanian girl's papers was enthusiastic. They looked forward to learning about a Middle Eastern culture. The fact that the girl was coming from a conservative society and could be expected not to object to house rules was not lost on them.

The student arrived and, as expected, accepted the host parents' rules without a murmur. School began quite soon after her arrival. The 17-year-old host sister helped her to become acquainted at the school, but stopped well short of accompanying her during every available moment. The Jordanian was distressed by this, but said nothing at the time. At home, she spent a great amount of time studying behind the closed door of her bedroom. The host parents admired her determination to succeed academically at first, but their admiration increasingly became tinged with regret that she was so frequently absent from family interactions. They rationalized their disappointment by saying that the AFSer's self-isolation must be a feature of her personality or culture, and they noted that there were no actual conflicts between her and family members. Furthermore, since she was not their natural daughter, they doubted their authority to compel her to join in family activities. They decided to be patient and tolerant.

Meanwhile, the Jordanian herself was feeling very "uncomfortable"

around members of the host family. It is not completely clear why they aroused anxiety in her, but I will relate our educated guesses. First, the host parents did not doubt their authority in *all* respects. If they presumed that the AFSer's physical well-being was at risk, they were quite capable of insisting that she take precautions. And if they wondered whether she might be showing interest in the wrong crowd, they took exception to her intentions socially. Their over-protectiveness may have had an inhibiting effect on the Jordanian. Second, beyond their concern for the student's health and morals, the parents seemed to assume that she was a self-reliant individual, which in many ways she was not. No one in the family gave her the kind of indulgent attention to which she had become accustomed, and she was incapable of taking the initiative in seeking it. Third, there seems to have been some feature of the parents' nonverbal behavior, especially certain facial expressions, that caused the girl to think, rightly or wrongly, that they were upset with her. Finally, she disliked the habit of family members' holding conversations in her presence in which she was not explicitly included.

By the time the cold weather set in, there were many signs that all was not well. The student spent hour upon hour alone in her bedroom on pretext of studying. There she ate bag after bag of candy (none of which she ever shared with anyone) and rapidly gained weight. In spite of expressions of interest, she "forgot" how to prepare Middle Eastern foods. And her telephone calls to one of her natural brothers, a university student in California, increased from one to two or three per week. When these calls first began, the host parents viewed them as useful for a

young girl so far from home. In time, however, they realized that their student was relying almost completely on her brother, not on them, for advice and guidance. Since the brother paid for all the calls, however, their most obvious line of objection was eliminated and they never made their concerns known. Generally, they continued to assume that the student's behavior was an expression of her culture or personality, and they maintained that, at base, the experience was proceeding satisfactorily. But the level of student-host communication was running close to zero.

In mid-January, the Jordanian suddenly burst into tears at school in the midst of a math class. Her guidance counselor contacted local AFS volunteers. The girl asked them to remove her from Family J, saying that family members did not want to share themselves with her. When the host parents heard this, they were stunned. They pointed out that their many requests for her to join them had been ignored. They were deeply hurt that the student had not come to them much earlier to explain whatever difficulties she was having.

Local AFS volunteers provided counseling for the student and the family after the student's breakdown, and certain particular problems were pinpointed at this time. One concerned a misunderstanding involving the Jordanian's wording and intonation of requests, which made them sound like demands to American ears. Another concerned the sharp difference in the expectations of the AFSer and the host sister regarding their relationship; the AFSer had expected an extremely close and dependent relationship, but the reticent and more self-reliant sister had never been prepared for this

level of commitment. Following the counseling, there was evidence that both student and hosts were attempting to turn the situation around. But the host parents were confused about the exact role they should be playing, and the student was suspicious of their motives because "they are doing what they are supposed to do only after I became upset." At the end of a trial reconciliation period set during the counselling session, an AFS volunteer appeared at Family J's door, helped the Jordanian pack her bags, and drove her away. As she departed, the AFSer stated that she "loved" the parents but was leaving because of the failure in her relationship with the host sister. That same day, the parents found out that the girl had used the reconciliation period to talk to other people in the community in a personal effort to find a new set of hosts. Deeply disappointed and very upset, the family was left alone to puzzle over what had gone wrong. Said the father much later, "To this day, I don't know what we did or didn't do to her."

Our analysis of this family's experience focuses on the following factors: (1) the unrealistic expectations of the student, which seem to have been for an intimate and indulgent relationship with the host sister if not also with the host mother; (2) the unexamined assumptions of the host parents, which seem to have been that the student required careful protection with respect to her health and morals but was largely self-reliant in other respects; (3) the student's increasingly heavy reliance on her natural brother for advice and guidance; (4) the failure of the host parents to notice and act upon several clear indications that the student was unhappy and maladjusted, compounded by the student's

inability to express openly her dissatisfaction; (5) the assignment of physical space in the home, which enabled the student to retreat at will into isolation; and (6) the misunderstandings involving facial expressions, conversational inclusion, the making of requests, and other subtle cultural differences, some of which may still remain unknown.

These three cases -- Families E, M, and J -- provide only one-fifth of the information that we have available as a consequence of AFS's Study of the Dynamics of Hosting. From our preliminary analyses of all 15 cases, we have arrived at some rather firm convictions regarding the nature of the hosting experience, at least insofar as it occurs in the United States. We recognize that practitioners are eager to know what we have learned from our four years of work, so I would like to close by listing some of the principal conclusions that we have drawn so far.

• The course of a student-host relationship depends more on personality factors than on cultural factors. Under the influence of Raymond Gordon, we embarked upon this project keenly interested in uncovering subtle cross-cultural differences that were undermining student-host relationships. We are coming away from this project impressed with the extent to which interpersonal difficulties seem grounded in individual temperaments and styles.

• A satisfying experience frequently depends more on student-host *sibling* relationships than on student-host *parent* relationships. In several of our cases, the quality of the experience for all concerned seemed directly tied to the course of the relationship between the exchange student

and one or more host siblings. In selecting host families and in placing exchange students with families, exchange agencies should give more attention to the characteristics of host siblings than they do at present.

• A satisfying experience is far more likely when the exchange student is willing to participate wholeheartedly in family activities. Students who isolate themselves are a *less* common problem than students who are determined to demonstrate their independence from the restrictions of family life. One of our strongest conclusions is that young people who are strongly oriented toward independence (especially those who have lived independently) are very poor risks on an exchange program that involves living with a host family. We wonder whether the U.S. students in Raymond Gordon's study did so poorly because they were older and accustomed to independence.

• When the exchange student is in frequent telephone contact with members of his or her natural family, the hosting experience is seriously undermined. The problem is not only that the student fails to depend upon the hosts for advice and support, but also that the natural family members very often give advice that is erroneous and counterproductive. Exchange organizations should use every means at their disposal to discourage frequent telephone contact between exchange students and natural family members.

• An authoritarian personality on the part of one or both host parents creates a highly structured situation that most exchange students find difficult to fit into. Students who are accustomed to living with authoritarian natural parents have a better chance of tolerating authoritarian hosts; but *highly* authoritarian applicants for hosting should be de-selected.